Status of the Literature Retrieval Division

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Attachment: 1980 Operating Expenses and Budget for 1981

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The status of the Literature Retrieval Division was overviewed and summarized in December 1979. At that time a number of vital short and longer term goals were established and approved. We are pleased to note that all these goals have already been accomplished or will be reached on, or ahead of, schedule.

A. Asbestos Literature. As previously discussed, gathering and processing the asbestos literature has been proceeding very well and with dispatch. (Refer to memoranda dated May 2, 1980 and September 19, 1980.)

Projects were initiated mid-year to identify, gather and process the remaining articles from the earlier published literature. These projects are essentially complete, and except for approximately 400 additional articles recently identified, all articles should be received and processed by year-end. The remaining 400 articles should be incorporated by March 1981. At that time there will be in the system more than 6,000 documents that deal with the health or biological effects of asbestos. It is anticipated that additional retrospective articles will be identified from time-to-time as our searching continues.

According to previously established guidelines, the only asbestos articles that are being fully processed are those that deal with either any form of lung cancer (not mesothelioma) and/or smoking. All other asbestos articles currently are retrievable by topic through classification codes and title words.

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B. Classification of Documents. The classification system for documents in the Preliminary Data Base was expanded earlier this year. This system recently was further refined and now includes more than 460 topical and 20 non-topical classification codes. Codes have been assigned to all 1980 prospective articles, all asbestos articles received to date and many pre-1980 articles. Approximately 60% of the 20,000 articles

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in the Preliminary Data Base will be classified by year-end, and the task should be completed by mid-1981.

The expanded classification system and the title word search capability have improved substantially the retrievability of documents in the Preliminary Data Base.

C. Title Word Search. The title word search capability for documents in the Preliminary Data Base has been fully operational since May. Studies currently are under way to determine whether or not to extend this capability to the Standard Data Base of fully processed documents.

D. Document Backlogs. We have made substantial progress dealing with backlogs at various stations of the operation. Document backlogs have been eliminated at the library/accessioning/bibliographic stations. In addition, we have reduced by 60% the backlog of documents awaiting complete processing. During 1981 we expect to process the remaining documents and to complete the shipping of aperture cards. When this has been accomplished, all backlogs will have been eliminated, and we will be up-to-date.

E. Document Selection. Earlier this year we initiated ongoing studies to attempt to determine why there had been a dramatic increase in the number of documents being selected. Preliminary data indicate that the literature is still increasing, but at a much lower rate than previously observed. It is anticipated that the number of selected documents will continue to increase, in part, because of our expanded coverage in the area of occupational respiratory disease.

As a result of our studies, a number of actions were taken to curb the input into the System of certain types of articles. We applied more stringent criteria for selecting certain articles that are currently included on a "selective basis." We discontinued the routine selection of certain borderline interest articles supplied regularly by an industry consultant. We placed less emphasis on selection as a mechanism for current awareness

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by discontinuing the selection of most news reports regarding articles to be published in primary journals that we receive. As our studies continue, we expect to further refine and tighten our selection criteria.

F. "Enriching" Documents. Certain lower level processed documents may require additional processing ("enriching") to enhance their retrievability and to expedite analysis. Document enriching will involve the addition to the data base of one or more precoordinated descriptors plus textual material such as an abbreviated abstract, the original author abstract or selected original text. These "enriched documents" would thus be processed at levels that are intermediate between lower level and full processing.

Earlier this year we initiated studies designed to characterize the intermediate levels of processing that would be required and then compared these levels to our current abstracting and indexing standards for fully processed documents. Preliminary results from these studies indicate that lower level and intermediate level processing will be adequate for approximately 60% of our prospective input. The other 40% will require full processing.

Completion of these studies and implementation of a procedure for processing documents at intermediate levels is scheduled for 1981. Because intermediate level processing requires an on-line computer system, implementation will depend on our success in converting the present system.

G. System Conversion. Our efforts to expedite the conversion of our current batch system and the automation of a number of manual functions were described in detail in our 1979 report. Feasibility studies were resumed earlier this year following the hiring and orientation of a full time senior systems manager to lead this activity. (Copies are available on request of memoranda describing these studies and of the system requirement specifications that were developed.)

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As a result of our studies, we plan to begin implementing the conversion to an on-line computer system using an in-house minicomputer during 1981. Final decisions regarding specific software and hardware vendors are expected to be made during the first quarter. At that time, we will present our final recommendations.

H. Other Activities. This year we continued to respond successfully to the increasing number and complexity of user projects. Compared to 1979, we have projected for 1980 a 57% increase in the number of current awareness updates, a 24% increase in the number of major requests and a 19% increase in the number of requests overall. These and other activities are indicative of the industry's increasing levels of confidence in, and reliance upon, the Division's resources and capabilities.

We also continued to expand and develop our management staff to handle the needs of our growing organization. A number of senior management positions were filled, mainly by successful promotions of existing staff members. In addition, certain organizational changes needed to deal with a number of current and projected tasks were effected or are planned. We also have continued to expand our efforts in staff development and training through private study, seminars and the use of specialized training tools. We hope to expedite the training of abstractors by the use of innovative training modules that were developed recently.

Finally, communications with the lawyers improved dramatically this year, and we enjoyed a closer and more continuous relationship that has provided more consistent, regular interaction.

I. Office Space. Our studies have shown that the current facility soon will not be adequate to house the operation. This is because our facility planning had not taken into account the magnitude of the increase in the number of routine documents being selected, the need to house large numbers of documents that fall outside our traditional selection guidelines,

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and the overall increase in the size of our staff because of these unanticipated situations.

By installing a high density file system we can increase substantially our document storage capacity without creating a hazardous plant condition. Preliminary engineering studies indicate that it is feasible to install this type of file system.

We project that the use of high density files for document storage will save enough floor space to handle our other needs through approximately December 1983. Office space in our building currently is renting for $25.00 per square foot, as compared to our current base rate of only $10.00.

J. Goals for 1981. The budget for 1981 provides funds for the completion of all goals set forth in December 1979 plus a number of additional tasks. During 1981 we expect to:

1. Eliminate the remaining backlog of documents awaiting processing, and complete the microfilming and shipping of aperture cards. This will bring us up-to-date.
2. Expedite the conversion of our current batch system to an on-line computer system using an in-house minicomputer.
3. Complete our feasibility studies, and implement a system to identify, store, retrieve and analyze documents that are processed at intermediate levels.
4. Expand our retrospective coverage of the literature to include all occupational respiratory diseases, but limit this activity during 1981 to the identification of this literature.
5. Initiate feasibility studies in connection with the retrospective input of all L.R.D. abstracts into the new on-line computer system.

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